

**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA ITEM TRANSMITTAL**

(1) DEPARTMENT Administrative Office	(2) MEETING DATE July 18, 2006	(3) CONTACT/PHONE Dan Buckshi (805) 781-5011	
(4) SUBJECT Request to approve recommended responses to the 2005-2006 Grand Jury Report on "The Future of Foster Children", and to forward the responses to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court			
(5) SUMMARY OF REQUEST The Grand Jury has prepared a report addressing the "The Future of Foster Children." The report addresses issues related to foster children who turn 18 and emerge from the foster care system. The report directs the Board of Supervisors to respond to six findings and two recommendations contained in the report.			
(6) RECOMMENDED ACTION The Board of Supervisors adopt the Health Agency's, the Probation Department's and the Department of Social Services' responses (Attachments 1-3) as the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2005-2006 Grand Jury Report titled "Aging Out: The Future of Foster Children", and forward these responses to the Presiding Judge.			
(7) FUNDING SOURCE(S) N/A	(8) CURRENT YEAR COST N/A	(9) ANNUAL COST N/A	(10) BUDGETED? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
(11) OTHER AGENCY/ADVISORY GROUP INVOLVEMENT (LIST): County Health Agency, Probation Department, Department of Social Services			
(12) WILL REQUEST REQUIRE ADDITIONAL STAFF? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, How Many? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Permanent _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Limited Term _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Contract _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary Help _____			
(13) SUPERVISOR DISTRICT(S) <input type="checkbox"/> 1st, <input type="checkbox"/> 2nd, <input type="checkbox"/> 3rd, <input type="checkbox"/> 4th, <input type="checkbox"/> 5th, <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All		(14) LOCATION MAP <input type="checkbox"/> Attached <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	(15) Maddy Act Appointments Signed-off by Clerk of the Board <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
(16) AGENDA PLACEMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing (Time Est. _____) <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Board Business (Time Est. _____)		(17) EXECUTED DOCUMENTS <input type="checkbox"/> Resolutions (Orig + 4 copies) <input type="checkbox"/> Contracts (Orig + 4 copies) <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinances (Orig + 4 copies) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	
(18) NEED EXTRA EXECUTED COPIES? <input type="checkbox"/> Number: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Attached <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A		(19) BUDGET ADJUSTMENT REQUIRED? <input type="checkbox"/> Submitted <input type="checkbox"/> 4/5th's Vote Required <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	
(20) OUTLINE AGREEMENT REQUISITION NUMBER (OAR) _____		(21) W-9 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	(22) Agenda Item History <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A Date _____
(23) ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE REVIEW			

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County of San Luis Obispo

COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER, RM. 370 • SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA 93408 • (805) 781-5011



DAVID EDGE
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: David Edge, County Administrative Officer

DATE: July 18, 2006

SUBJECT: Response to the 2005-2006 Grand Jury Report on "The Future of Foster Children."

RECOMMENDATION

The Board of Supervisors adopt the Health Agency's, the Probation Department's and the Department of Social Services' responses (Attachments 1-3) as the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2005-2006 Grand Jury Report titled "Aging Out: The Future of Foster Children", and forward these responses to the Presiding Judge.

DISCUSSION

The Grand Jury issued its report June of 2006, which required responses from the County Health Agency, Probation Department, the Department of Social Services, and the Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors is required to respond to six of the seven report findings (Findings 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) and two of the four recommendations (Recommendations 1 and 3). Additionally, the report required that Cuesta College and the County Office of Education respond to the findings and recommendations in the report. These latter two responses are not included in this letter, as these two entities will respond independent of the County.

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors adopt the responses from these three County departments as its response to the 2005-2006 Grand Jury Report.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The Health Agency, Probation Department, and Department of Social Services completed responses as required by the Grand Jury.

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FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

None, the actions stated in the attached responses do not have a fiscal impact.

RESULTS

Approval of the Grand Jury response will assure the County's compliance with the California Penal Code.

Attachments:

- (1) Health Agency's response
- (2) Probation Department's response
- (3) Department of Social Services' response

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MENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT
1011 Pacific Street. San Luis Obispo, Ca 93401
805/781-4719

DATE: June 29, 2006

TO: Dan Buckshi, Administrative Analyst

FROM: Karen Baylor, Ph.D., MFT, Behavioral Health Administrator

SUBJECT: Response to Grand Jury Report

This is provided as the required response to the Grand Jury's Report: "Aging Out: The Future of Foster Children". The Grand Jury's report contains seven findings and four recommendations. The Mental Health Department was instructed to respond to six of those findings and one of the recommendations.

Finding 1: Many former foster teens are either homeless, or because of substance abuse or other issues, are now in jails, prisons or mental institutions.

Response: The Mental Health Department partially disagrees with this finding. While data from some national studies support this statement, the Department does not have any data regarding former foster teens for San Luis Obispo County that would support this finding.

Finding 2: No response required from the Mental Health Department

Finding 3: Many former foster teens do not have support group or relatives to return to or (sic)

Response: The Mental Health Department agrees with this finding.

Finding 4: Many former foster teens have difficulty traveling to Cuesta College to take advantage of the programs offered.

Response: The Mental Health Department partially disagrees with this finding in that the Department does not have any data regarding former foster teens for San Luis Obispo County that would support this finding.

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Finding 5: Many former foster girls become pregnant soon after leaving foster care.

Response: The Mental Health Department partially disagrees with this finding. While data from some national studies support this statement, the Department does not have any data regarding former foster teens for San Luis Obispo County that would support this finding.

Finding 6: Many former foster teens have severe mental illness problems that interfere with their ability to hold a job, find housing and support themselves.

Response: The Mental Health Department partially disagrees with this finding. While there is the perception that former foster teens have a mental illness due to the past trauma in their lives and there are national studies that support this statement, the Department does not have any data as it applies to San Luis Obispo County.

Finding 7: Many former foster teens turn to prostitution or other crimes to get money for food and rent.

Response: The Mental Health Department partially disagrees with this finding. While data from some national studies support this statement, the Department does not have any data regarding former foster teens for San Luis Obispo County that would support this finding.

RECOMMENDATION 1: A task force should be formed to provide leadership in addressing the problem of housing for teens aging out of foster care. This task force could be instrumental in seeking grants for residential living in individual or shared apartments with resident advisors.

Response: This recommendation has already been implemented although additional work needs to be done. The Department of Social Services is engaged in a number of initiatives that address this issue and has a Permanency Committee. The Mental Health Department also has a Placement Committee with a variety of community partners as members through the SAFE program.

The Mental Health Department was recently notified that the Community Services and Supports Plan (CSS) of the Mental Health Services Act was approved by the state. With the implementation of the CSS Plan, there will be services including housing provided to transitional age youth with mental illness. The Transition Age Youth Full Service Partnership (TAY FSP) will provide

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wraparound-like services for 16 to 21 year olds with serious emotional disturbances/serious mental illness. The goal of the new TAY FSP is to identify early on those who are, or at risk of, having difficulty with the process of transition to adulthood. TAY FSP participants will receive intensive services designed with them to help secure a place to live, work and learn in their community. Each participant will meet with his/her team to design his/her personal service plan which may include goals and objectives that address improving family relationships, securing housing, job readiness, completion/continuation of education, vocational skill building, independent skill building, learning how to understand and use community resources, financial/legal counseling as well as traditional mental health services such as medication supports, crisis services, case management and therapy.

The Mental Health Department will coordinate with existing housing contractors to provide housing for FSP participants. The goal is have the participants take personal responsibility and make good choices about their lives when provided with housing, services and supports they need. This program is transformative and advances the goals of MHSA by enhancing and expanding services that are relevant to TAYs at this critical developmental stage.

Conclusion:

The Mental Health Department appreciates the Grand Jury educating the public on identifying problems with the foster care system at the national level. The Mental Health Department recognizes that while action has been taken to address these issues locally, there is always more that needs to be done. The Mental Health Department will be implementing the TAY FSP program within the next several months. The Department is extremely excited to be able to provide these services to an underserved population.

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PROBATION DEPARTMENT

"Protection, Service & Accountability"



Kim Barrett
Chief Probation Officer

Myron Nalepa
Assistant Chief

Main Office (805) 781-5300 ~ 2176 Johnson Ave., San Luis Obispo, CA 93408
Juvenile Services Center (805) 781-5352 ~ 1065 Kansas Ave., San Luis Obispo, CA 93408
Juvenile Hall (805) 781-5389 ~ 1065 Kansas Ave., San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

DATE: June 29, 2006

TO: Vince Morici, Administrative Analyst

FROM: Kim Barrett, Chief Probation Officer

SUBJECT: Response to Grand Jury Report: "Aging Out: The Future of Foster Children"

This is provided as the required response to the Grand Jury's Report: "Aging Out: The Future of Foster Children." The Grand Jury's report contains seven findings and four recommendations. It has been requested we respond to six of those findings and one recommendation.

Finding 1: Many former foster teens are either homeless, or because of substance abuse or other issues, are now in jails, prisons or mental institutions.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While we are aware of data from national studies that support this statement, there is no reliable data available that would support this statement as it applies to San Luis Obispo County.

Finding 3: Many former foster teens do not have a support group or relatives to return to or (sic)

The Department agrees with this finding.

Finding 4: Many former foster teens have difficulty traveling to Cuesta College to take advantage of the programs offered.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While there may be a "sense" that this is true, there is no data to support this conclusion.

Finding 5: Many former foster girls become pregnant soon after leaving foster care.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While we are aware of data from national studies that support this statement, there is no data that would support this statement as it applies to San Luis Obispo County.

Finding 6: Many former foster teens have severe mental health problems that interfere with their ability to hold a job, find housing and support them.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While we are aware of data from national studies that support this statement, there is no reliable data that would support this statement as it applies to San Luis Obispo County. However, we do know that we do have former foster teens for which this is true. It is our hope the Transitional Age Youth program through the Mental Health Services Act, which is due to be implemented within the next few months will address this issue with any of our youth who are mentally ill and transitioning out of foster care.

Finding 7: Many former foster teens turn to prostitution or other crimes to get money for food or rent.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While we are aware of data from national studies that support this statement, there is no reliable data that would support this statement as it applies to San Luis Obispo County.

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Recommendation 1: A task force should be formed to provide leadership in addressing the problem of housing for teens aging out of foster care. This task force could be instrumental in seeking grants for residential living in individual or shared apartments with resident advisors.

This recommendation has already been implemented, although additional work needs to be done. The Probation Department participates in the Permanency Committee developed by the Department of Social Services. This committee is implementing procedures and policies to ensure that every child has an identified permanent home within 120 days of entering foster care. We also partner with Family Care Network who provides housing (apartments with residential advisors) for teens aging out of the foster care system. The Transitional Age Youth needs have been discussed through our collaborative processes (Placement Committee, Mental Health Services Act, CPOC, etc.), resulting in both the Probation Department and the Behavioral Health Agency implementing Transitional Age Youth caseloads and specialized services in the new fiscal year. This issue is discussed and updated through the Children's Services Network as an ongoing need that all agencies work diligently together to address. The Leadership is being provided by the agencies that serve these youth.

Conclusion:

The Probation Department appreciates the Grand Jury educating the public on these issues and the nationwide data that supports them. It is important to note that local agencies and individuals have taken action to address these concerns, proactively responding to national trends to ensure the foster care youth of San Luis Obispo County needs are met to the best of our ability. There will always be work to be done in this arena and we will continue to work diligently on this issue.

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

3433 South Higuera Street, P.O. Box 8119, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-8119

DATE: June 28, 2006
TO: David Edge, County Administrative Officer
FROM: Lee Collins, DSS Director
SUBJECT: Response to Grand Jury Report

This is provided as the required response to the Grand Jury's Report: "Aging Out: The Future of Foster Children." The Grand Jury's report contains seven findings and four recommendations. We are required by the Grand Jury to respond to six of those findings and to two of the recommendations.

The Department of Social Services appreciates the interest of the Grand Jury in the state of Child Welfare Services generally and in the well-being of foster children, specifically. We would note that the Grand Jury might have been better informed—and the public better served as a consequence—had they considered interviewing members of the Department's management staff in their pursuit of this analysis.

Because they did not, their report fails to include information concerning major initiatives and program improvement activities that address the County's children. In this response, we will note these activities along with the caution that much work remains to be done.

Before we address the specifics of the Grand Jury report, we want also to comment on some of the report's sweeping conclusions about children in foster care. On page 4 of the report, for example, the Grand Jury states:

It is not uncommon to see teens living under bridges, sleeping in cars and creek beds, or dealing drugs. Many are just "on the run" until they exhaust their resources. Some teens, both male and female, turn to prostitution and other crimes to survive. Some run the risk of sexually transmitted diseases. Young women often become pregnant soon after leaving foster care.

While data from national studies support these generalizations, there is no reliable data that would support the Grand Jury's findings at the local level. Longitudinal studies have not been conducted, and there is nothing but purely anecdotal observations that could lend any credence to this finding. By using these sweeping comments to describe foster children, the Grand Jury risks stigmatizing the very children they wish to help. We would urge the residents of San Luis Obispo to read these descriptions of our community's children with appropriate skepticism.

Finding 1: Many former foster teens are either homeless, or because of substance abuse or other issues, are now in jails, prisons or mental institutions.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While we are aware of data from national

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studies that support this statement, there is no reliable data that would support this statement as it applies to San Luis Obispo County.

Finding 2: (No response required by Social Services Department)

Finding 3: Many former foster teens do not have a support group or relatives to return to or (sic)

The Department agrees with this finding.

In response, we have taken steps to improve familial bonds for children who must be removed from their biological parents. We know that children have the best outcomes when placed with family members; similarly we know that they have the worst outcomes when placed in group homes or other congregate care facilities.¹

To address this, San Luis Obispo County was one of the first counties in California to implement the "Family to Family" model, developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Strategies of F2F include Team Decision Making, in which family members are invited to join DSS staff and foster families to choose among placement options for children.

The County has been successful beyond our own projections in placing children with relatives, and reducing placements in group homes. There is no county in California that has a higher percentage of placements with relatives. Compare the County's data with Statewide data for the most recent quarter for which data is available:²

Percent of children whose primary placement is with relatives:

San Luis Obispo:	60.3%
California:	38.9%

Percent of children whose primary placement is in group home or shelter:

San Luis Obispo:	2.1%
California:	7.7%

Percent of children who are placed with some or all of their siblings:

San Luis Obispo:	77.8%
California:	67.8%

It is clear that San Luis Obispo County is leading the State in addressing these concerns. In fact, the

¹ See for example, National Institute of Mental Health Publication No. 01-4588, or on-line at <<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/teens.cfm>>

² Fiscal Year 2004/2005: Data available at <http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/CDSSCounty_1954.htm>

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County has been chosen by the Stuart Foundation to be a “mentor county” for F2F in California, assisting other counties in implementing the proven strategies of the Family to Family program.

Finding 4: Many former foster teens have difficulty traveling to Cuesta College to take advantage of the programs offered.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding, on the basis that no evidence is provided in support of the conclusion.

Finding 5: Many former foster girls become pregnant soon after leaving foster care.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While we are aware of data from national studies that support this statement, there is no reliable data that would support this statement as it applies to San Luis Obispo County.

Finding 6: Many former foster teens have severe mental health problems that interfere with their ability to hold a job, find housing and support themselves.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While we are aware of data from national studies that support this statement, there is no reliable data that would support this statement as it applies to San Luis Obispo County.

We would note, however, that local stakeholders have identified Transitional Age Youth as a priority population for funding in a Full Service Partnership under the Mental Health Services Act. We also have worked closely with the Behavioral Health Division of the Health Agency, the County Administrative Office and the Board of Supervisors in welcoming the nationally known Kinship Center to San Luis Obispo County.³

Finding 7: Many former foster teens turn to prostitution or other crimes to get money for food and rent.

The Department disagrees partially with this finding. While we are aware of data from national studies that support this statement, there is no reliable data that would support this statement as it applies to San Luis Obispo County.

Recommendation 1: A task force should be formed to provide leadership in addressing the problem of housing for teens aging out of foster care. This task force could be instrumental in seeking grants for residential living in individual or shared apartments with resident advisors.

This recommendation already has been implemented, although additional work is required.

We would have appreciated the opportunity to inform the Grand Jury of some of the ongoing

³ Kinship Center will commence operations in Fiscal Year 2006/07. Please visit their website at < <http://www.kinshipcenter.org/> >

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activities and consortia in which the Department is engaged, including the California Permanency for Youth Project, the New Ways to Work initiative and the Youth in Transition Task Force. These initiatives have helped us make significant ongoing progress in improving outcomes for children in care.

San Luis Obispo is one of thirteen counties in the State involved with the California Permanency for Youth Project. This Project offers technical assistance for counties who are finding permanent homes for youth in foster care. San Luis Obispo County has signed a Permanency for Youth agreement that states our commitment to ensuring that no youth leave our care without either an adoptive home, someone who is their legal guardian, or a trusted caring adult who has committed to stay connected to the youth.

The County has a contract with Transitions Mental Health to provide two full-time staff whose only duties are to identify connections for youth in care. They work with the youth to discover relatives or adults with whom the youth has a relationship.

San Luis Obispo is one of only twelve counties invested in the "New Ways to Work" initiative. This project provides Technical Assistance to coordinate employment services for children in care either through Probation or Child Welfare Services. We currently are involved in a major project--partially supported by the California Endowment, Cal Poly, Cuesta College, the Private Industry Council, Probation Department and the Department of Social Services--to map out all the available employment and supportive services for youth transitioning into adulthood. This New Ways to Work taskforce will use the maps to identify gaps in services and begin planning to fill in these gaps.

The Department of Social Services has a Youth in Transition Task Force; known as the "Permanency Committee," the Task Force is implementing procedures and policies to ensure that every child has an identified permanent home within 120 days of entering foster care. Federal and State regulations require not only that we pursue reunification but also that we consider the fact that the child may *not* be reunified. This is known as "concurrent planning." We have monthly "concurrent planning" meetings to identify youth who have entered care and to ensure that the home in which they currently are placed can be a permanent home, if reunification is not successful.

Our success in pursuing these initiatives is evaluated in part by the outcome measures by which the Federal and State Governments monitor our performance. One measurement is the length of time that children remain in foster care, and San Luis Obispo County has decreased that length of time by nearly 30% over the last three years.

The number of adolescents in care has decreased by nearly 50%. In the last quarter only seven youth emancipated from foster care without a permanent home and those youth had a connection with an adult who made a commitment to mentor them through their transitional years.

The Department is pleased to see that the Legislature and Governor are attentive to the challenges of improving Child Welfare Services and the foster care system. The recently approved budget

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includes significant new resources that will assist in reducing caseloads, increasing housing opportunities and expanding opportunities for children to remain with relatives.

Recommendation 3: At least six months prior to emancipation, a mandatory exit plan should be created for each youth to follow which identifies specific support people and local resources. Foster parents need both training and incentives to encourage them to participate in these exit plans.

This recommendation already has been implemented.

The "Chaffee Act" created a Federal mandate that every child have a transitional plan starting at age 15 ½. These plans are called Transitional Living Plans and are a part of every child's case plan. San Luis Obispo County is 100% compliant with having a plan for every child.

State regulations require that the County ensure that all foster children, starting at age 14, identify someone in their lives who can be a trusted, caring adult as they transition to adulthood. These adults agree to provide support for the youth, even if the youth doesn't live with them. These adults may provide a place for the youth to spend holidays or to live when dorms shut down. Or they may simply be a person who listens and emotionally supports the youth.

CONCLUSION

The Department of Social Services appreciates the intentions of the Grand Jury in identifying problems with Child Welfare and Foster Care at the national level. These problems have been well documented. It is important to note, though, that local agencies and individuals have taken action to address these concerns, and these actions are showing great promise.

It is ironic to note that the Grand Jury provided the Department with its report on May 31, 2006, the exact date of the Independent Living Program's Annual Banquet. Even as the Grand Jury was reporting that our community's children allegedly were living under bridges, dealing drugs and prostituting themselves for food, twenty-three youth were receiving educational scholarships at this annual award ceremony.

Hosted by Cuesta College, the event was well attended by youth, community partners, members of the County Board of Supervisors, and members of the Juvenile Court Stakeholders group, including Judge Teresa Estrada-Mullaney. Laptop computers were awarded to five youth, and many additional awards were presented to help youth with transportation, employment, and housing needs.

It is right and proper that the Grand Jury report on the flaws in local systems and initiatives, but it is equally important that the Grand Jury seek to identify promising practices and programs. Had they done so, they might have reported that San Luis Obispo County's Child Welfare Services system has been designated by the Children's Defense Fund as one of the top ten programs in the nation that is showing promise in interrupting the "Cradle to Prison Pipeline."

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We think that's worth noting.

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